



# DISABILITY PRIDE

## INTERVIEW WITH FORENSIC ACCOUNTANT KYLE

FBI Forensic Accountant Kyle has played a vital role in the success of many high-profile investigations and has received multiple awards for his work. He is a role model of excellence for his colleagues and his community.

### What is your disability?

I am legally blind. I was diagnosed with a retinal degeneration disease that is a juvenile form of macular degeneration. I had perfect vision up until about 5th grade when I started noticing I could no longer see the blackboard well at school. My vision deteriorated pretty quickly after that. When playing baseball in the outfield, I could only start to see the ball once it was already about halfway down, so I had to develop a very fast reaction time to catch it. I now have limited vision that continues to worsen as I get older. I can't read an eye chart but can see how many fingers the doctor is holding up. My eyes are also very sensitive to light, so I always set my computer to have a black background with light writing.

### Describe your career at the FBI.

I'm a forensic accountant. I conduct analysis of banking and financial records as a part of the investigative team. I came to the Bureau right out of college as an accounting technician in Dallas in 1988. About 20 of us were hired all at once to support a major case there. I later transferred to the Jacksonville Field Office where I've worked ever since.

Throughout my FBI career, I've been selected twice for a Director's Award, received two medals of excellence, and been chosen four times as Outstanding Law Enforcement Officer in multiple categories by the US Attorney's Office. I've worked some very interesting cases including supporting the Unabomber

investigation. It's been a wonderful career, and I wouldn't change anything about it. The FBI is a great organization to work for. I've been encouraged by the mindset shift over the years as more people with disabilities join the Bureau.



### What did you do before joining the FBI?

Sports have always been an important part of my life. I started playing football in junior high. At first, the coaches didn't want to let me play due to not understanding my ability but rather focusing on my disability – but I was able to prove my value to the team. I was a running back in high school and ranked All Conference, All City, and honorable mention All State in Florida. My teammates made some accommodations for me when playing such as handing me the ball instead of throwing it, and I would

use my analytical thinking skills to predict where the hole would be based on our blocking scheme. I started my college career playing football for the University of Central Florida. I ended up meeting my future wife and transferring to the University of North Florida in Jacksonville where I graduated with my degree in accounting. As I mentioned before, I came to the FBI right out of college. My only work experience prior to joining the Bureau was working as a janitor for Sam's Club. People at Sam's were skeptical of my ability to effectively do my job as a blind person, but I made sure that place was spotless! Everyone gained respect for my capabilities and work ethic. My motto has always been "don't dwell on what you can't do but focus on what you can do." As someone with a disability, I find that I always must prove myself again when I enter new environments or situations. Even when I started work at the Bureau, they first stuck me in the file room while others hired at the same time as me were given interesting and challenging assignments. It took hard work and strong self-advocacy to demonstrate my capabilities and ability to support the mission as effectively as my colleagues.

### **What accommodations do you use in your work at the FBI? What did the reasonable accommodations process look like for you?**

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I use two software programs to help me read information on the computer. One helps magnify text on the screen, and another reads information on the screen out loud. Since I have to magnify the text on my computer so much, I use a larger-than-standard computer monitor. I also use stand-alone magnifying devices to read hardcopy documents. When I first came to the FBI, I brought my own magnifier to use. Back then, these magnifiers were very bulky with a large base underneath and CCTV on top. They've become much more user-friendly and portable over the years, and I was able to get one that I can easily bring with me when I testify in court. I've always had great support from my supervisors and SAC's when it

comes to purchasing the equipment I need to do my job. I use my remaining vision to help me navigate, but it can be difficult to get around in new or unfamiliar areas. When I testify in court, I come in to get situated without the jury present. Once my testimony begins, we typically discuss my blindness and the magnifying equipment I'm using right away to answer the questions the jurors might have.

### **What challenges have you faced during your FBI career or hiring process related to your disability, and how did you overcome them?**

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When I began work at the FBI, my supervisors and coworkers didn't really have experience working with someone with a disability. They didn't want to overtask me and walked on eggshells around me rather than allowing me to do my job. I had to prove myself by proactively seeking out work, whereas others without disabilities were handed meaningful work right out of the gate. I had a candid conversation with my supervisor during my first performance review about my situation and was able to convince them to give me more challenging tasks. By the time I left Dallas, I had become comfortable taking an active role in the investigative team. It was a lot easier to prove myself when I transferred to Jacksonville because I had gathered a lot of experience and could share my previous accomplishments.

### **What do you wish people knew or understood better about your disability?**

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I think every person with a disability just wants to be treated normally by other people and respected for what we can offer. I remember first reading the story of Moses in the Bible. Moses was tasked by God to lead the children of Israel away from captivity by the Egyptian Pharaoh. Moses thought he couldn't do

this work because he was slow of speech, but God said “Who has made man’s mouth? or who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? not I the LORD?” This story changed my perspective. I believe that we are all uniquely created by God, and our differences can be assets. I can use what talents I have to better this world.

## What are some ways your disability has had a positive impact on your life?

I think my disability has given me a work ethic I may not have otherwise developed. I also think it has made me stronger as a person. I always wanted to be self-reliant and to never be treated as less of a person due to my blindness, so I’ve worked very hard to ensure I’m independent and contribute to society.



## What personal and/or career advice would you give to an FBI employee who has a disability?

As an employee, you have the choice of doing the minimum of what’s required or going above and beyond to support your team. In my experience, with hard work and time, people will eventually notice your

ability to contribute to the team. Don’t limit yourself. You have something valuable to offer, so don’t focus on the negative. Always give 110%. That’s the most effective way to demonstrate all you have to offer to the organization. Whatever you do, do it to the best of your ability.

## What advice would you give to the parent of a child with a disability?

I think it’s important not to make your child feel different. Focus on their strengths rather than their differences or limitations. Together, we can work toward teaching kids that they are special and can accomplish what they put their minds to. I was raised by my dad, and I was fortunate that once we realized I was losing my vision, he still allowed me to be a normal kid. For example, I kept playing football even though some people might have thought it was too dangerous or difficult for someone who is legally blind. I think it’s very important for kids to have opportunities to live their lives to the fullest without being overly sheltered or limited because of their disabilities.

## What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

I have a lot of hobbies! I enjoy lifting weights and have won several bench press contests at the YMCA. I also enjoy running races. I love coaching kids. I coach soccer and started a track team at my daughter’s high school. I’m a deacon at my church and teach Sunday school as well.